

## ns after iraq/africa

# Our strange friends in the south

Only four African countries supported the war, and their leaders all have a taste for invading their neighbours.

**RICHARD DOWDEN** fears they will be tempted to indulge it

**A**t first it was obvious how the war on Iraq would affect Africa: a rise in the oil price, though nice for African petroleum producers in the west and south, will seriously hurt other impoverished economies that have no oil. The tourism industry will diminish. Aid will be diverted to the humanitarian needs of Iraq. Earmarked funding may protect Africa in the short term but in the longer term she will lose out.

Africa will again be marginalised and neglected because world attention is focused elsewhere. The prospects for Nepad (the New Partnership for Africa's Development), a new deal between rich countries and Africa to develop the continent, will suffer. Already in April and May, five high-level meetings for Africans visiting London have been cancelled because of the war.

Some might have expected that a western attack on a Muslim country would spark religious wars in Africa. All of North Africa is predominantly Muslim and most sub-Saharan African countries have significant Muslim and Christian populations. Nigeria, for example, has more Christians and Muslims in one nation than any other country in the world. It has suffered frequent eruptions of inter-faith violence and some manipulative politician may yet spark off more, but so far this has not happened. African politics is driven largely by internal factors and religion is usually just one cause of conflict, not the sole cause.

But now a deeper, more insidious pattern is beginning to emerge. Which African countries came out in support of the war? Not Kenya and Tanzania, which have suffered collateral damage on their territories from Islamist attacks on America and Israel. They might well have joined an alliance against "terror" but no, they have remained silent. So has Djibouti, the tiny but strategically vital Red Sea port enclave, even though President Ismael Omar Guelleh gave the use of its port, airport and military bases to America. Yet he said nothing in public.

In March Africans watched with amusement as poor Valerie Amos, Britain's minister for Africa, was sent to try to persuade the African waverers on the United Nations Security Council to vote for Britain and America in a second resolution. In Guinea, she found the president dying; Cameroon is in France's pocket;



Ricochet: the Ethiopian troops who pulled out from Eritrea in 2001 may soon be back

and Angola's government is one of the most corrupt in Africa. The Foreign Office insists that Baroness Amos had no aid bribes to offer, only sweet reason. We will never know how great her powers of persuasion were because the threat of a French veto killed off the prospect for a second UN resolution. However, in Guinea, she thought she had made progress at her first meeting with the ailing President Lansana Conté, only to find that his female Liberian *marabout*, a sort of sorceress, had got to him and persuaded him by means beyond the reach of diplomacy to oppose the war.

Only four countries came out in public support of Bush and Blair: Ethiopia, Eritrea, Uganda and Rwanda. They have other things in common, too. Their present rulers came to power through the barrel of the gun and believe in war as a legitimate political tool. As Dr Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, general secretary of the Pan-African Movement, points out, they support Bush because they hope he will support their own wars. All of them have attacked their neighbours in recent years, claiming self-defence. Twice Rwanda and Uganda invaded the Democratic Republic of Congo to effect regime change. The first time they succeeded and removed Mobutu Sese Seko from power. The second time they failed, but five years later they still have troops there. Now they have started fighting each other. Heavily aid-dependent, they are desperately competing for American and British favours, aid and political support.

Ethiopia and Eritrea are in the same position. Eritrea has attacked three of its neighbours and fought Ethiopia for two years

as the two nations tried to wipe each other out. Now they, too, are competing for American support and western aid.

Already the Iraq war has distracted attention from events in Africa. The first coup on the continent since the millennium, in the Central African Republic, went almost unnoticed. Nothing has been done to reverse it. More dangerous wars threaten. Ethiopia and Eritrea may well start fighting again. An international commission has just demarcated the boundary between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and has handed the disputed town of Badme to Eritrea. Badme was used by the Ethiopians as a rallying cry in the war and many believe that Prime Minister Meles Zenawi cannot survive if he allows it to be returned to Eritrea.

**R**wanda and Uganda are also on the brink of another war with each other. Their rulers, Paul Kagame and Yoweri Museveni, former close allies, now hate each other with a passion. They fought three pitched battles at Kisangani in Congo in 1999 and 2000 but were persuaded to cool it, notably by Clare Short, the International Development Secretary. Today, visitors to each capital are regaled with tales of the "terrorism" and treachery of the other. The recent massacre in eastern Congo was a result of the proxy war between them. They are no longer fighting just for the minerals and timber they have been looting for the past few years; they now simply want to hurt each other. Without a concerted, concentrated effort by other countries in the region and donors, Uganda and Rwanda may go to war again.

This time Short will be too busy rebuilding Iraq to spend time holding them back. And she cannot use the argument that their invasion of Congo is illegal. Museveni and Kagame are only doing what her government has done in Iraq. Indeed the most destructive weapons of mass destruction since the Second World War have been the machete and the kitchen knife, used in Rwanda in April and May 1994 to butcher almost a million people.

What of the rest of the continent? I have just returned from a trip

to Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire, where I asked everyone I met if they supported the war. From presidents to peasants, the answer was no. A colleague asked a similar question in East Africa; the answer was the same. Reports from South Africa echo this opinion. For once, Africa's leaders seem to be speaking for their people. They signed an African Union declaration demanding that war only be declared with the UN's blessing.

If the British government says that they give a different message in private don't believe it. Even Meles Zenawi, a supporter of the war, went out of his way to tell me that the issue for Ethiopia is not nuclear, chemical and biological weapons but Islamic fundamentalism in the Gulf. He feels the overthrow of Saddam Hussein will open up the possibility of secular democratic states in the region, and that that will benefit the Horn of Africa.

The whisper inside the Foreign Office is that the war in Iraq, in fact, has ripped a huge hole in Britain's credibility in Africa. Since the end of the cold war, Britain has sought to co-operate with France and the UN to push Africa higher up the international agenda and secure international support for initiatives to bring peace and development. By turning its back on the UN and falling out with France, Britain has set back that multilateral, UN-based international co-operation by years. It may be dead.

If Britain and America do not manage to resurrect it quickly, Britain will be left following Washington's global "for us or against us" policy. America's levers for this policy are the African Growth and Opportunity Act (its new trade agreement with individual countries) and the Millennium Challenge Account. These bilateral agreements were aimed originally at granting trade and aid benefits to African countries that were democratic, had a good human rights record and followed free-market policies. Now they may become crude tools for propping up allies.

Washington, already upset that Nigeria, Africa's biggest oil producer, refused its suggestion to leave Opec, was further irritated when President Olusegun Obasanjo, with President Thabo ►

# THE NEAPOLITAN RIVIERA

newstatesman

Get away on this ever popular week-long break and discover Italy's stunning Neapolitan Riviera. Seek out Greek and Roman remains, explore pretty seaside villages, and admire the rugged coastline and sparkling waters of one of the most beautiful regions of Europe. Surrounded by amazing scenery, you can take a trip to legendary Capri, visit the haunting site of Pompeii, experience the unforgettable Amalfi Drive and enjoy the charming coastal resorts of Positano, Sorrento and Ravello.

Accommodation is a choice of three and four star hotels, based in some of the best resorts on the coast, perched on the cliffs high above the Bay of Naples. The pretty and peaceful village of Sant'Agata is 5 miles from Sorrento and has a small selection of bars, shops and restaurants. Sorrento enjoys a more cosmopolitan atmosphere, its bustling old town a maze of narrow alleyways crammed with shops of every description and cafe-life spills out onto the piazza pavements.

Our range of hotels suits most tastes and budgets. The friendly and informal three-star Hotel Delle Palme, and the small family-run three-star Hotel Villa Fernanda are located right in the heart of Sant'Agata; the stylish traditional four-star Jaccarino Hotel, a short walk away from the centre, is highly regarded for its elevated setting and good food. The three-star Hotel Regina and four-star Hotel Continental offer alternative accommodation in the centre of Sorrento.

**What the price includes** ♦ Return charter flights from London Gatwick or Manchester to Naples ♦ Return airport to hotel transfers in Italy (approximately 2 hours) ♦ Seven nights accommodation based on the three-star Hotel Delle Palme in the heart of Sant'Agata - the other four hotels mentioned above are also available for a reasonable supplement ♦ Continental breakfasts and three-course evening meals ♦ The services of a tour manager in resort



**TRAVEL OFFER**

To book this holiday or to request a brochure, call:

020 8335 3030

(PLEASE QUOTE CODE: NST)

Flying from London Gatwick  
Weekly departures on a Friday,  
from May to October, from just  
**£369**

Flying from Manchester  
Weekly departures on a Friday,  
from May to October, from just  
**£389**

**NEWMARKET**   
The Reader's Holiday Company

THIS HOLIDAY IS OFFERED ON OUR WHOLE BY  
NEWMARKET AIR HOLIDAYS LTD • Aylesford • Kent

## The aid agencies fear collateral damage

**A**nd so the fallout begins. As Iraq moves into repair, the British government will have to start mending bridges with its allies. One friendship that will need close attention is with the British aid sector.

Charity law is supposed to prevent charities from taking political positions. During the attack on Iraq, charities had to tread the fine line between expressing serious concern about the human consequences of the conflict, and saying what they all really thought: that without UN backing, the war was illegal and immoral and would have disastrous consequences for their work in the Middle East and around the world.

"There are many of us who feel the war is not just illegal, it's horrific," said one insider at a leading British aid group during the conflict. "Of course corporately that's not our position."

On the surface the aid groups and Clare Short's Department for International Development make a pretty tight alliance – what one aid agency spokesperson described as a "little caucus of support". In her monthly meetings with the British Overseas Aid Group (BOAG), made up of the directors of Cafod, Save the Children, ActionAid, Christian Aid and Oxfam, Short has privately urged them to lobby the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, to release more cash for her department. In turn, BOAG members offered support during her "night of anguish" as bombing loomed without UN backing. It was Julian Filochowski, director of Cafod, who made that reassuring personal call informally urging her to stay.

But below the surface, relations are not so rosy. The aid agencies are furious that, in the run-up to the conflict, Short's department refused to release any funds to help them prepare for a humanitarian crisis. After the bombing began, when a tiny amount was made available, many refused to apply, not wanting to be tainted by funds from a government waging war.

They are also dismayed that Britain launched another war when the humanitarian fallout from the last one, in Afghanistan, had not yet been cleaned up. During the past year, due to the security vacuum outside Afghanistan's main cities, aid agency workers there, caught between warring factions that the coalition forces had promised to deal with, have faced robbery, rape and even murder.

It is for Tony Blair, however, that the aid agencies reserve their real anger. His public claim to have been running a humanitarian campaign in Iraq, while doing little of the sort, could have devastating consequences all over the world for their work. It has been well rehearsed that having the military hand out aid endangers civilians and aid workers alike. In most developing countries where British aid agencies work, the war was regarded as an imperialist invasion. Those receiving assistance from aid groups are beginning to confuse British aid with British bombs. Across the Middle East, British aid workers are finding it harder to do their work. Staff in India and Bangladesh have received hate mail.

"There's no doubt that people don't make the distinction between the British government and British aid workers," said Salil Shetty, the chief executive of ActionAid and chair of BOAG. "And of course, they don't know the difference between No 10 and the Department for International Development."

Blair's inability to confirm a UN-led reconstruction of Iraq, and a UN-led humanitarian programme, could now be the last straw in relations with the British aid sector, which until this conflict had generally offered private support to the government, and Short's department in particular.

"We are stomping our collective feet rather loudly, and it's about to come to a head," said Dominic Nutt at Christian Aid.

British aid groups just cannot stomach working in Iraq under the instruction of a US general or stooge. But nor do they want to leave the homeless and thirsty of Iraq without help.

Blair and the Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, claimed to have done their best to push a UN-led solution to the humanitarian fallout in post-conflict Iraq. For one aid agency chief that just isn't good enough: "They said they were trying their best over a second UN resolution, and look where we are now."

Relations between the government and the British aid sector are just one addition to the war's collateral damage. Next time around, will the agencies tread so carefully between politics and charity, or will they publicly add their considerable weight to the anti-war campaign?

**Gideon Burrows**

► Mbeki of South Africa, had the audacity to suggest that the US and Britain needed a second UN resolution to go to war. President Obasanjo, who prides himself on his friendship with America, was phoned and ticked off by a junior White House official. An American military training programme in Nigeria was promptly cut.

For many Africans, such humiliation will stir feelings like those of a Ghanaian banker friend who told me recently he was so distressed by the war that he found it hard to work. Then suddenly he realised why. "They are doing to Iraq what the British did to my country, my people, 100 years ago," he said.

"I have never realised the terribleness of it until now."

This feeling will awaken a dormant suspicion that Britain and America have a neo-imperialist agenda in Africa. Mbeki has already warned: "If the UN does not matter, why should we, the little countries that make up the African Union, think that we matter and will not be punished if we get out of line?"

That will amuse one man: Robert Gabriel Mugabe. You can almost hear him chuckling: "Told you so. That is what you get for bowing down to the white man." Unless Britain is prepared to implement "regime change" by force in Zimbabwe, it is the Saddam of Central Africa who has most to gain from this war.

